

16th December, 1991

Dear Dave Feikert,

We met a couple of years ago.¹ I write to you now on behalf of the Clydeside Action on Asbestos group of which I'm a member. I'm not sure how much you know on this subject, but suspect you aren't unfamiliar with it...

I also enclose some of the material we've had in various publications over the past few months, to give you an idea of the Scottish perspective on this particular struggle. Members of this group are also assisting at the Scottish Hazards Conference 1992 which takes place several weeks prior to the 6th National Hazards Conference in Sheffield.

My reason for writing concerns the talks going on between the NUM and the TGWU, with particular reference to industrial disease. The NUM has long been the envy of other workers where these issues are concerned, I refer specifically to the special consideration miners have achieved in connection to pneumoconiosis. In Scotland an essential part of our campaign is the attempt to gain parity with the NUM membership. Victims of asbestosis still cannot get access to the C.T. scan; up here they are forced to go under the knife; they have to endure biopsies in order to "prove" to the PMB and the authorities in general that they have the disease. Guilty until proving yourself innocent. This can include victims of mesothelioma, even when they've already been diagnosed with the disease by GP's, they are required to "prove" it to the authorities, which has obvious repercussions on disability entitlements. Asbestos victims can spend years trying to gain sufficient evidence of asbestos-related pneumoconiosis to warrant recognition from the DSS, and often die in the process.

On the compensation side matters are at least as bad and needless to say the authorities' insistence on proof of causation guarantees big favours for the insurers and the asbestos industry who knowingly set fatal working conditions for these men and women, i.e. they knew they were liable to cause fatalities within the workforce but carried on regardless, usually with the full weight of the state behind them and, it has to be said, with the tacit knowledge of certain officials within the trades union and Labour movement.

Those victims who fight for compensation and succeed in wringing

¹ We were both appearing at the *Radical, Black and 3rd World Bookfair*, you taking part in a forum while I was doing a reading the following night.

something out the asbestos industry nowadays have to confront another obstacle in the form of the DSS Compensation Recovery Unit (the C.R.U.). If a claimant receives a sum of money s/he is then liable to pay back ALL the disability entitlements paid to them by the DSS prior to settlement. The only group not drawn into this particular DSS web, is the NUM membership; they are excluded from the C.R.U. stranglehold.

So on these two issues - obligatory access to the C.T. scan, and the implications on compensation with the C.R.U. - the thousands of workers who suffer from that other form of pneumoconiosis, asbestos-related disease, are closely interested in the current talks. It has to be said, and speaking as an ex-member, that the TGWU, unlike the NUM, hasn't exactly been in the vanguard on Health and Safety. I hope you won't regard this as presumptuous but appreciate the very real worries held by very many people, that the ground made by the NUM, which is a yardstick for us, may be lost.

It would be good keeping in touch with you on behalf of the group and I enclose some of the material we've had in publications recently to give you an idea of the nature of our campaigning, also the support and counselling service we offer individuals victims.

All the best

Winter 1991-92

Tom Cook
Asbestos Diseases & Industrial Cancer Victims Group
PO BOX 3089, Parramatta
Sydney, New South Wales

Dear Tom Cook,

Greetings from Scotland, U.K. We're into winter here and no doubt the sun'll be shining down under. Ah well...

Can you get a photograph of the woman's¹ father to us? If so we can do a sort of poster along the lines of the enclosed which had good results for the man's widow. We have access to TELEGRAPH, the paper put out by N.U.M.A.S., the seamen's union, and would send the poster to them, amongst others.

There's a surgeon visiting across in your country² just now by the name of Dr -----³. I hope he's there to learn and not teach. He is notorious in Glasgow for the biopsies he performs.⁴ So much so that the experienced members of this group advise people against going there. He's been challenged by us not just because he has a 100% failure rate but because of those who have later died as a consequence of his surgery. He is very suspicious of our group and calls those among us who refuse his biopsies "hostile patients". He also tried to silence a social worker based in his hospital who, he thought, was supplying us with information. As regards his record he defends himself by saying that no one has actually died while on the operating table...

It would be good to keep in regular contact with A.D.I.C.V., exchanging information etc. We got a copy of BLUE MURDER recently and I think I speak for the rest of the group in saying this book will be absolutely basic to the fight in this country; there is much we can learn from the struggle you have had in the aftermath of the Wittenoom horror.

As you may know our own group is more or less the central office not only for Scottish but the U.K. as a whole in terms of the asbestos struggle. We are an action group and believe in taking the fight as far as it goes. That means gathering as much factual evidence, detail and information as possible, trying to analyse that and see where it takes us. Needless to say we are not a "funded body". Recently

¹ Rebecca McIntosh

² Sydney

³ Dr Prakash

⁴ at Haremyres Hospital

we achieved charity status which has advantages, but the main disadvantage, perhaps, is that we have to be seen as "non-political", and in many respects it is impossible not to be "seen as political" (i.e. how can you take on the legal system, the medical profession, government agencies like the Dept of Social Security etc etc without being political!). Our existence makes certain officials uneasy if not embarrassed and therefore we do get occasional donations officially, from trades unions and other sources. For your information I enclose a copy of -----⁵ which contains an article written by us. Keep in touch. Have you a FAX number?

Best regards to all at the Parrammatta office.

⁵ BLOW OUT, a regular newspaper put out by black-listed off-shore oil workers